DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 070 955 AC 014 127

AUTHOR	Steele, Doris H.; Cunningham, Clarence J.
TITLE	Opinion Leadership in Family Living among Low Income Homemakers in the Expanded Nutrition Program in Ohio. Research Series in Agricultural Education.
INSTITUTION	Ohio State Univ., Columbus. Dept. of Agricultural Education.
PUB DATE	Apr 72
NOTE	19p.; A research report of a graduate study
EDRS PRICE	MF-$0.65 HC-$3.29
DESCRIPTORS	Data Collection; Doctoral Theses; *Family Life; *Homemaking Education; Information Sources; Interviews; *Leadership Qualities; *Low Income Groups; *Participant Characteristics; Questionnaires; Research; Sociometric Techniques
IDENTIFIERS	*Ohio

ABSTRACT

To identify selected personal and social characteristics of those from whom low-income homemakers sought advice and information in family living, data were gathered from 131 homemakers who were enrolled in the Expanded Food and Nutrition Program in Cincinnati, Ohio, and from 30 opinion leaders who were identified by the homemakers. A descriptive survey utilizing individual interview techniques was the main procedure used in gathering data, and a few mailed questionnaires were used to obtain information from the opinion leaders. The opinion leaders were those who were named by two or more homemakers as persons from whom they would seek advice and information, based on 10 different hypothetical situations. A self-designation technique of identifying opinion leaders was also utilized, allowing both homemakers and opinion leaders to score themselves on a 0-6 scale. Specific conclusions reached were as follows: (1) There was no significant difference between the ages of the homemakers and the opinion leaders; (2) Opinion leaders had achieved a higher educational level; (3) Opinion leaders had a significantly higher income than the homemakers; (4) Magazines and radio were utilized by more opinion leaders than homemakers, but television and newspapers were utilized similarly by both groups; (5) Relatives were used more often by the homemakers as a personal source of information; and (6) Opinion leaders had a higher socioeconomic level than the homemakers. Recommendations are made, and a bibliography is provided. (DB)

ED 070945

RESEARCH SERIES IN AGRICULTURAL EDUCATION

A Research Report
of a
Graduate Study

"OPINION LEADERSHIP IN FAMILY LIVING AMONG LOW INCOME HOMEMAKERS IN THE EXPANDED NUTRITION PROGRAM IN OHIO"

By Doris H. Steele and Clarence J. Cunningham

Issued by
The Department of Agricultural Education
College of Agriculture and Home Economics
The Ohio State University
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RD 014 127

ED 070955

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OPINION LEADERSHIP IN FAMILY LIVING AMONG LOW INCOME HOMEMAKERS IN THE EXPANDED NUTRITION PROGRAM IN OHIO

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to identify selected personal and social characteristics of those from whom low-income homemakers sought advice and information in family living.

Specific questions for the study were:

1. To what extent did low-income homemakers identify opinion leaders?
2. To what degree did opinion leaders and homemakers differ on:
   a. formal education?
   b. socioeconomic status?
   c. use of mass media?
   d. income?
   e. age?
   f. source of personal advice?
3. Did the opinion leaders live within the neighborhood?
4. Was there a significant relationship between the age, education, and income of the homemakers and their personal sources of information and use of mass media?

Rationale

The Cooperative Extension Service has directed a considerable portion of its resources into work with low-income families. The most current emphasis was the Expanded Food and Nutrition Program with low-income families in the 50 states and Puerto Rico.

The People Left Behind recommended that the:

> Federal Government provide funds to create homemaking teams composed of professionals and subprofessional aides to work intensively with all low-income rural families.
>
> These teams should provide personalized counseling and educational services. The Extension Service should call on voluntary leadership developed through home demonstration clubs to supplement this effort.[1]

The report of A People and A Spirit[2] recommended that the Cooperative Extension Service:

> . . . fully commit their staffs to work on the problems of the disadvantaged by:
>
> a. increasing staff to work with the disadvantaged, including employment of people from the target population.
> b. developing programs specifically for the disadvantaged that would develop leadership and participation.
>
> The committee further recommended:
>
> 1. The Federal Government provide additional funds to the Cooperative Extension Service for work with the disadvantaged and the alienated ethnic groups by grants to states which have significant numbers of minority groups.
>
> 2. The Extension Service employ subprofessional aides from the target population, thus providing both employment opportunities and more effective access.[3]

Lloyd H. Davis, former Administrator, FES, in a presentation on "The Expanded Nutrition Education Programs" stressed the fact that

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[1] President's National Advisory Commission on Rural Poverty, Report of the Commission, The People Left Behind (Washington, D. C.: Superintendent of Documents, U. S. Government Printing Office, 1967) p. 55.

[2] Joint USDA-NASULGC Study Committee, Report of the Committee, A People and A Spirit (Fort Collins Printing and Publications Service, Colorado State University, 1968), p. 61.

3. Ibid., p. 61.

low-income and disadvantaged people do not participate freely in group activities and are difficult to reach. Davis said:

> . . . past experience has indicated that aides who come from the community to be served, who are generally from the same economic level have a superior ability to establish rapport and to communicate with the people we seek to serve. . . . They must have an interest in helping their neighbors to achieve a better life.[4]

As Extension assumed the leadership of working with low-income families in family living, it needed to develop new techniques and methods. One that had not been developed to any extent was working through the leaders among the low-income homemakers.

Beavers[5] said the Cooperative Extension Service, in helping low-socioeconomic families, must involve the people directly in helping themselves. Although their leadership was not readily recognized by the educator, it did exist.

Douglah[6] declared the lower class had the fewest group memberships of any social group, but had the greatest need for the most fundamental kinds of education. One of the greatest potentials might be through the neighborhood organizations.

Brown and Marsh[7] suggested one goal of Extension in working with the low income would be to work with lay leaders and others in

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[4]Lloyd H. Davis, "The Expanded Nutrition Program" (paper presented at the National Association of State Universities and Land Grant Colleges meeting, Extension Service Section, November 11, 1968), p. 11.

[5]Irene Beavers, "The Disadvantaged," Journal of Cooperative Extension, III (Winter, 1965), p. 237.

[6]Mohammad Douglah, "Some Perspectives on the Phenomenon of Participation," Adult Education, XX (1970), p. 94.

[7]Minnie M. Brown and C. Paul Marsh, "Extension and Poverty," Journal of Cooperative Extension, III (Fall, 1965), p. 163.

the community in developing an attitudinal climate that would encourage participation in educational and training programs and would encourage local people to seek appropriate assistance from all agencies.

To conserve resources--time, money, and energy--and reach a larger number of clientele, it seemed necessary to identify those opinion leaders from whom low-income homemakers sought advice and information in family living. Rogers[8] said they are most often members of the social system in which they exert their influence. These persons channel information by personal communication to their followers.

Methodology

The study was based on data gathered from 131 homemakers enrolled in the Expanded Food and Nutrition Program in Cincinnati, Ohio and 30 opinion leaders identified by the homemakers. A descriptive survey utilizing individual interview techniques was the main procedure used in gathering data. A few questionnaires were mailed to opinion leaders identified by the homemakers. Opinion leadership was identified by the use of a sociometric technique. Individual homemakers were asked to identify persons from whom they would seek advice and information based on ten different hypothetical situations related to homemaking. Sociometric scores were computed by summing the number of times an individual was named by the homemakers for each area. Those persons named two or more times were classified as opinion leaders.

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[8]Everett M. Rogers, Diffusion of Innovations (New York: The Free Press of Glencoe, 1962), p. 16.

A self-designation technique of identifying opinion leaders was also utilized. It consisted of administering to homemakers and opinion leaders a six-item scale. It was possible for homemakers and opinion leaders to score themselves from 0-6 on the scale. Those homemakers and opinion leaders scoring 4-6 points were categorized as perceiving themselves as opinion leaders.

Conclusions and Implications

The analysis of the data collected for this study provided findings the investigator used in the formulation of general and specific conclusions. In the writer's judgment, the implications apply primarily to the Expanded Food and Nutrition Program. The following conclusions were drawn from the general findings of this study:

Conclusion 1:

Opinion leadership existed among the low-income homemakers.

Implication 1:

In attempting to create any change among homemakers in family living, the Extension Home Economists in the counties or urban areas should take the leadership in identifying those individuals among whom opinion leadership is particularly concentrated.

Conclusion 2:

Opinion leadership among low-income homemakers was concentrated among a few individuals.

Implication 2:

Since opinion leadership was centralized among a few individuals, it would appear consideration should be given to alternative methods of reaching homemakers so as to utilize the capabilities of these

opinion leaders to the utmost.

Conclusion 3:

Opinion leaders tended to be more monomorphic in this study than polymorphic.

Implication 3:

Since low-income homemakers identified more leaders to advise on one subject matter rather than leaders to advise on several subject matters, it would seem there exists a need to be more knowledgeable and cooperate more with other agencies and organizations in planning and implementing programs that relate to the various family living areas.

Conclusion 4:

More opinion leaders designated themselves as opinion leaders than did the homemakers when the self-designation technique was utilized.

Implication 4:

The self-designating technique may be used to learn how the opinion leader perceives himself as a leader. It could also be used to learn how the homemaker perceives herself as a leader. This might be effective in the selection of homemakers to initiate programs within the neighborhood with the hope they might be early adopters of change.

Conclusion 5:

Opinion leaders lived within the neighborhood and also some distance away, but seldom outside of the city.

Implication 5:

Since opinion leaders lived within and some without the neighborhood, it is necessary to learn where other identified opinion leaders live and their relationship to the neighborhood. Do they work there?

Did they once live there?

Conclusion 6:

Personal sources of information were identified among people in both the white-collar and blue-collar occupations.

Implication 6:

Opinion leadership may be scattered among persons with various levels of occupations and these persons should be sought out with the intent of identifying their capabilities as leaders. Providing them with training opportunities in keeping with their abilities or learning about their abilities as a resource would be most helpful in working with low-income homemakers. They should know resources available to them. There seemed to be some evidence in this study that those persons knowing about resources available to them utilized them more extensively.

Conclusion 7:

Regardless of age, education, or income, homemakers do use mass media as a source of homemaking information.

Implication 7:

Homemakers do learn information from the mass media that helps them in homemaking. A knowledge of the sources of mass media would be helpful in planning and implementing programs for low-income homemakers. It was apparent the mass media influenced the homemakers in this study.

Conclusions and Implications Related to Hypotheses

As a result of testing the hypotheses, the following specific conclusions and attendant implications were made:

Conclusion 1:

There was no significant difference between the ages of the homemakers in this study and the opinion leaders.

Implication 1:

Since age of opinion leaders is not different from homemakers, other criteria would be more meaningful in identifying opinion leaders.

Conclusion 2:

Opinion leaders had achieved a higher educational level than the homemakers.

Implication 2:

The majority of the opinion leaders had achieved 10-12 years or more of education. It would appear that the least amount of education acceptable for selection of those to work with low-income homemakers would be the tenth grade level.

Conclusion 3:

Opinion leaders had a significantly higher income than the homemakers.

Implication 3:

The majority of the opinion leaders had a higher income than the homemakers. In selecting leaders to work with low-income homemakers, those who have a somewhat higher income than the homemakers should be chosen.

Conclusion 4:

Magazines and radio were utilized more by opinion leaders than the homemakers, but television and newspapers were utilized similarly by both groups.

Implication 4:

Since both groups used mass media, it might be well to consider programs that could be presented by mass media to be shared by opinion leaders and homemakers.

Conclusion 5:

Relatives were used more often by the homemakers as a personal source of information than by the opinion leaders. Neighbors were not sought frequently as a source of information. The professional-technical and managerial-official-proprietor personal resource was sought most frequently by both groups.

Implication 5:

Other members of the nuclear family of the homemaker--such as the husband and members of the extended family, such as the mother, are influential in the making of decisions by the low-income homemaker. They should not be overlooked when the aides are working with the homemakers. Neighbors were not sought frequently as a personal source of information. Persons tend to use professionals or well trained persons pertinent to their problems when they have a knowledge of whom they are. Efforts should be made to acquaint families with such resources.

Conclusion 6:

Opinion leaders had a higher socioeconomic level than the homemakers.

Implication 6:

In general, persons who had a higher socioeconomic status were selected as opinion leaders. This implies it would be better to employ persons who have a somewhat higher socioeconomic status than that of the homemaker.

Recommendations

The recommendations for further research and program implementation listed herein are based on the findings and conclusions drawn from this study and the impressions gained by the writer in conducting the study. As a result of this study, the following recommendations are made:

1. A sociometric technique of identifying opinion leaders should be utilized when starting in a new area to work with low-income homemakers. Time should be planned and allowed for this identification. Persons who relate to the homemakers would be ideal to do the interviewing.
2. Greater cooperation is needed between those who are working with low-income homemakers to avoid overlap and utilize the competence of the various ones in attacking the problems of family living. There exists the need for the team approach as social accountability is assumed for the family. Consideration might be given to the establishment of an interagency committee to consider programs and training for those working with low-income families.

3. Consideration should be given to the personal and social characteristics of opinion leaders identified in this study when employing new personnel.
4. Development of a mass media educational program that incorporates family living problems in keeping with the pattern of living of low-income families. This should be concurrent with an educational program to be shared with the families by those working with families. The results should be studied to see if there is any correlation between the two techniques.

Recommendations for further study include:

1. This study indicated that opinion leaders exist among low-income homemakers in the Expanded Food and Nutrition Program. The investigator suggests that the study be replicated in several other counties and states. This replication would aid in reinforcing or in providing data needed to restate the conclusions drawn pertaining to the identification of opinion leaders and their personal and social characteristics. This replication would aid in determining whether there was any correlation between opinion leaders found in metropolitan, rural, and urban areas. The replication would also aid in determining whether or not the self-designation technique is a desirable method to use in the perception of opinion leadership.
2. A study of the resources available to low-income families for family living with the intent of the development of a

manual for the low-income families with concurrent training for them.

3. A study of the leadership qualities of opinion leaders among low-income homemakers would be helpful in the selection of leaders.
4. A study of opinion leaders who are from the system with those external to the system to learn their personal, social, and leadership characteristics and their influence on those in the system.
5. A study of how opinion leaders perceive their roles as opinion leaders.
6. A study to learn how effectively aides in the Expanded Food and Nutrition Program perceive themselves as opinion leaders.
7. A study to learn how effectively homemakers in the Expanded Food and Nutrition Program perceive the aides as opinion leaders.

Concluding Statement

This study represented an attempt to learn whether or not opinion leadership existed among low-income homemakers and, if so, to identify selected personal and social characteristics of those from whom low-income homemakers sought advice and information in family living. Further investigation in this area would provide additional understanding and insight which is essential to those in the Expanded Food and Nutrition Program in bringing about educational change among low-income homemakers.

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